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ABSTRACT

The author describes Unesco's program for education of the handicapped. It is pointed out that the program's main tasks are to create and develop contacts with United Nations and specialized agencies and with nongovernmental organizations working for the handicapped, to plan and carry out worldwide studies within the different fields of special education, and to assist member states in developing educational facilities for the handicapped and training of their teachers. (SBH)

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PLENARY SESSION 3

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CHALLENGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

by

Nils-Ivar Sundberg
Unesco, Paris

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have come together to consider the challenge of special education in developing countries. May I first of all introduce the panel. I have with me Dr. Berta de Braslavsky who has wide experience in Latin American countries, Dr. Tesome G. Wagaw, who is well acquainted with the situation in African countries, and Father Henri Bissonnier who has a broad knowledge of the situation in many countries throughout the world, following extensive travel and participation in numerous gatherings. I am Nils-Ivar Sundberg, and am responsible at the Unesco Secretariat in Paris for the Organization's programme of special education for the handicapped, which started ten years ago.

The main tasks of the programme are:

- to create and develop contacts with United Nations and Specialized Agencies and with non-governmental organizations working for the handicapped, which number about forty;

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- to plan and carry out worldwide studies within the different fields of special education, the list of which is available here and from the special education unit of Unesco, 75007 Paris, for those interested;
- to assist Member States upon their requests in developing educational facilities for the handicapped and training of their teachers, providing fellowships and educational equipment and also supporting meetings or seminars in the special education field.

May I give only one example from among the above 150 projects which have been carried out by Unesco in the special education field in about 70 countries during the existence of its special education programme:

During a preparatory meeting at the Unesco Secretariat for the International Book Year, 1972, it was felt that activities should also be devoted to promoting books for the blind. It was suggested that these activities be concentrated on French-speaking countries in Africa, where so far very little has been done in this field. Somebody suggested the establishment of a Braille printing press in this area. However, upon reflection it was clear that in an area without any schools for the blind a Braille printing press would be of little use until such facilities had been created. How could encouragement be given towards providing educational facilities for the blind? A Round Table could be arranged for high-level policy-makers and administrators from countries in the region to persuade them of the necessity of organizing education for the blind in their countries. To this end, therefore, Ivory Coast, a well-placed country with a relatively stable economy was invited to host such a Round Table meeting, and expressed interest in this, but not until the country had something to show to participants in the meeting. Ivory Coast had at that time devoted 30 percent of its budget to education but did not have any special education classes in

the country which were supported by government or community funds. There was only one private school for the mentally retarded where each place cost the equivalent of a workingman's salary.

Unesco organized a meeting in its Secretariat building with representatives of Ivory Coast, the French Ministry of Cooperation, the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind and Swiss Caritas, and during this morning meeting Swiss Caritas agreed to undertake the construction of a school for the blind in the area of Abidjan. When this school was finalized in 1975, a meeting was organized during the Spring of 1975 to prepare the Round Table. After some difficulties in fixing the date of the meeting, the Round Table was finally carried out in April 1977 in Abidjan. The meeting was very successful.

The meeting elaborated recommendations which were then officially submitted by the Director-General of Unesco to governments in Member States which had been invited to participate in the Round Table. In 1978, as a follow-up action to the Round Table, a Unesco staff member visited five countries in the region for discussion with the authorities on further development of educational facilities for the handicapped.

It has been a real pleasure to note that since the planning of the Unesco Round Table began in 1972, the Ivory Coast has developed an institute for the blind, a school for the deaf, and has built a new school for the mentally retarded to which anybody without financial means has access. The participants in the Round Table took away with them a very good impression of educational facilities in this country. Ivory Coast paved the way for others to follow.

Now I should like to give the floor to my colleagues on the panel.

Unesco and Its Programme for Education of the Handicapped

by Nils-Ivar Sundberg, Unesco, Paris

For ten years Unesco has been running a programme on education of the handicapped, the tasks of which are:

- to establish and develop contacts with the United Nations Organization and its Specialized Agencies concerned, as well as with non-governmental organizations working for the handicapped;
- to organize and run world-wide studies needed in each of the several fields of special education, such as education of the deaf, the blind, the mentally retarded, the motor handicapped and the socially maladjusted;
- to assist Member States, upon their request, through the services of consultants and experts, in planning their activities and training teachers in this field; providing fellowships for the further development of organization and for teacher training; supplying educational equipment to Member States for the establishment of special educational classes, institutions or centres.

The very fact that Unesco has set up a special education programme has helped to encourage national efforts towards the development of special education in some developing countr es.